

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 HA-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
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R 021240Z DEC 77
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7724
INFO AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 NEW DELHI 17161

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PDIP, IN, BG
SUBJECT: INDO-BANGLADESH RELATIONS: REFUGEES, TIGER SIDDIQUI
AND PRESIDENT ZIA

REFS: A. DACCA 6888, B. NEW DELHI 16983, C. DACCA 6909

SUMMARY. IN THIS PARLIAMENTARY SESSION, RELATIONS WITH BANGLADESH HAVE BEEN THE SUBJECT OF REPEATED QUESTIONS INVOLVING HIGHLY EMOTIONAL CHARGES OF REFUGEES FLEEING REPRESSION IN BANGLADESH AND OF THE GOI HAVING SOLD OUT BOTH POLITICAL REFUGEES AND FARAKKA TO A FASCIST MILITARY JUNTA. GOVERNMENT LEADERS HAVE RESPONDED CONSISTENTLY WITH DENIALS OF EITHER A REFUGEE INFLUX OR APPEASEMENT OF THE BDG AND HAVE REITERATED THE POLICY OF NON- INTERFERENCE IN BANGLADESH AFFAIRS. MEANWHILE, TIGER SIDDIQUI SURFACED IN DELHI AND CALLED UPON GOVERNMENT AND PARTY LEADERS, INCLUDING THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE FOREIGN MINISTER. GOI OFFICIALLY SAID THAT SIDDIQUI WAS TOLD THAT NO POLITICAL ACTIVITY AGAINST BANGLADESH WOULD
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BE PERMITTED FROM INDIA. SPECULATION THAT GENERAL ZIA MAY VISIT INDIA CONTINUES, EMBELLISHED BY ONE REPORT THAT ZIA WILL VISIT ALL THE SUBCONTINENTAL CAPITALS. BOTH MEA AND THE BANGLADESH HIGH COMMISSION IMPLIED THAT A VISIT WAS A POSSIBILITY. END SUMMARY.

1. RELATIONS WITH BANGLADESH HAVE BEEN THE SUBJECT

OF REPEATED QUESTIONS IN THE CURRENT NOVEMBER/DECEMBER SESSION OF PARLIAMENT. THESE QUESTIONS HAVE EVOKED ESSENTIALLY THE SAME, BUT INCREASINGLY MORE SHARPLY WORDED RESPONSES FROM THE GOVERNMENT. IN SUM, THE HIGHLY EMOTIONAL CHARGES ARE THE HINDU REFUGEES IN ALRGE NUMBERS ARE FLEEING FROM DISCRIMINATION AND REPRESSION INT THE "ISLAMIC" STATE OF BANGLADESH, THAT POLITICAL REFUGEES ARE BEING PUSHED BACK INTO BANGLADESH WHERE SOME HAVE BEEN KILLED SUSEQUENTLY, THAT PM DESAI STRUCK A DEAL WITH PRESIDENT ZIA IN LONDON ON BOTH THE REFUGEES AND FARAKKA, AND THAT THE FARAKKA AGREEMENT WAS A "SELLOUT". TO ALL THIS, GOVERNMENT LEADERS, PRINCIPALLY DESAI AND FOREIGN MINISTER VAJPAYEE, HAVE RESPONDED THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAS CONVEYED ITS CONCERN ABOUT THE MINORITIES TO VARIOUS LEVELS OF THE BDG, INCLUDING PRESIDENT ZIA, AND HAVE RECEIVED ASSURANCES OF THEIR PROTECTION. THE MINISTERS HAVE NOTED THERE IS NO EVIDENCE OF LARGE SCALE IMMIGRATION AND HAVE URGED MPS NOT TO BLOW THIS SENSITIVE SUBJECT OUT OF ALL PROPORTION. THAY HAVE STATED FURTHER THAT THERE HAVE BEEN NO DEALS OR SELL OUTS AND NOBODY HAS BEEN FORCED BACK TO BANGLADESH. THOSE BANGLADESHIS WHO WISH TO REMAIN MAY DO SO PROVIDED THEY DO NOT ENGAGE IN POLITICS OR LIVE NEAR THE BORDER. PARLIAMENT SHOULD BE CAREFUL, HOWEVER, NOT TO CONFUSE ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS WITH REFUGEES.

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AS TO CHARGES THAT THE BDG IS A THEOCRATIC, FASCIST MILITARY JUNTA, DESAI HAS REFUSED TO BE DRAWN, STATING THAT IT IS NONE OF HIS BUSINESS TO CHARACTERIZE ANOTHER GOVERNMENT OR TO INTERFERE IN ITS INTERNAL AFFAIRS.

2. THE PARLIAMENTARY CRITICS OF THE BDG SPAN THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM.

THE LEADING CRITIC FOR THE JANATA IS SAMAR GUHA OF WEST BENGAL, BUT HE HAS BEEN JOINED BY SEVERAL ERSTWHILE JANA SANGHIS WHO PLAY ON THE HINDU PERSECUTION THEME AND IN SO DOING HAVE NOT HESITATED TO TAKE ON THE FOREIGN MINISTER, HIMSELF A FORMER JS LEADER. AMONG THE OPPOSITION ARE CONGRESS AND CPI MEMBERS WHO CONTINUALLY REHEARSE THE HISTORY OF BANGLADESH AND THE DEATH OF SECULAR DEMOCRACY THERE. THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSES HAVE NOT SATISFIED THESE CRITICS. THEY REJECT GOI FIGURES ON BANGLADESH IMMIGRANTS, STATED TO BE 15,278 IN 1974, 38,000 IN 1975, 7,294 IN 1976, AND 7,014 THROUGH OCTOBER OF THIS YEAR. INSTEAD, THEY QUOTE A "STATESMAN" ACCOUNT THAT 50,000 HAVE CROSSED OVER IN RECENT MONTHS. THE CRITICS ALSO INSIST THAT THE INFLUX OF REFUGEES IS INDIA'S BUSINESS AND THE

CONDITION OF MINORITIES AND REPRESSION IN GENERAL IN
BANGLADESH AN INTERNATIONAL CONCERN.

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R 021240Z DEC 77
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3. DESAI AND VAJPAYEE HAVE BEEN INCREASINGLY SHORT
TEMPERED IN THEIR RESPONSES TO THESE REPEATED QUERIES.
THIS IS HARDLY SURPRISING GIVEN THE PERSISTENCE OF THE
QUESTIONERS, WHO SEEM OBLIVIOUS TO GOVERNMENT STATEMENTS
AND REPEATEDLY RETURN TO THE FRAY WITH MANY OF THE SAME
QUESTIONS. IT MAY ALSO STEM FROM THE DIFFICULTY THE PM,
THE FOREIGN MINISTER AND OTHER SPOKESMEN FIND IN
MAINTAINING AT THE SAME TIME A STANCE OF NON-INTERFERENCE
IN BD AFFAIRS AND AN IMAGE OF CONCERN FOR CIVIL
LIBERTIES, DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS, AND THE CONDITION OF THE
MINORITIES. THIS DILEMMA LED VAJPAYEE ON DECEMBER 1 TO
RESPOND TO SAMAR GUHA THAT IT WAS INCORRECT TO CALL
BANGLADESH AN ISLAMIC STATE SINCE THE WORD "SECULAR" IN
THE BANGLADESHI CONSTITUTION HAD BEEN REPLACED ONLY BY
REFERENCE TO THE "ALMIGHTY", AND PRESIDENT ZIA HAD
REASSURED THE INDIANS THAT AN ISLAMIC STATE WOULD NOT
BE DECLARED. BUT VAJPAYEE ALSO FOUND IT NECESSARY TO
SAY THAT HE WANTED THAT "OUR NEIGHBORS SHOULD ALSO FOLLOW
THE POLICY OF SECULARISM AS WE HAVE BEEN DOING".
(ISLAMABAD: IT WILL BE INTERESTING TO SEE IF THE GOP
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PICKS UP THIS COMMENT, MADE BY A LEADER IT HAD MISTRUSTED FOR HIS EARLIER "HINDU COMMUNAL" APPROACH.)

4. IN THE MIDST OF THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES, TIGER SIDDIQUI SURFACED IN NEW DELHI LAST WEEK AND CALLED UPON GOVERNMENT AND JANATA PARTY LEADERS, INCLUDING DESAI, VAJPAYEE AND JAGJIVAN RAM. HIS CALLS WERE NOT PUBLICLY ANNOUNCED BUT WERE LEAKED TO THE "HINDUSTAN TIMES" NOVEMBER 26 (ACCORDING TO ONE GOOD SOURCE AT THE INSTANCE OF THE JANA SANGH WING OF THE RULING PARTY). THE NEWSPAPER SAID THAT SIDDIQUI WOULD ONLY SAY THAT HE WAS SATISFIED WITH HIS TALKS WITH THE PRIME MINISTER, BUT HE VOLUNTEERED THE COMMENT THAT "PRESIDENT ZIAUR RAHMAF IS ON THE WAY OUT" BECAUSE THE PEOPLE OF BANGLADESH WERE BECOMING INCREASINGLY "IRREPRESSIBLE". THE "HINDUSTAN TIMES" ALSO SAID THAT GOVERNMENT LEADERS MADE CLEAR TO SIDDIQUI THAT NO POLITICAL ACTIVITY DIRECTED AGAINST ANY OF INDIA'S NEIGHBORS WOULD BE PERMITTED. THE LEAK LED NEXT DAY TO AN OFFICIAL SPOKESMAN STATING THAT DESAI AND VAJPAYEE AGREED TO MEET SIDDIQUI PRINCIPALLY TO TELL HIM THAT THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT GIVE ANY SUPPORT OR ENCOURAGEMENT TO ANYONE TO CARRY OUT POLITICAL ACTIVITY AGAINST NEIGHBORING STATES AND HELD STRICTLY TO A POLICY OF NON- INTERFERENCE IN THE AFFAIRS OF BANGLADESH. SEVERAL WELL-INFORMED JOURNALISTS, WHO ARE UNSYMPATHETIC TO THE BDG, HAVE TOLD US THAT GOVERNMENT LEADERS MET WITH SIDDIQUI BOTH TO TELL HIM THIS AND TO REASSURE HIM THAT HE WOULD BE ALLOWED TO REMAIN IN INDIA PENDING, AS ONE SOURCE PUT IT, HIS RELOCATION TO A THIRD COUNTRY. ASKED BY AN EMBOFF ABOUT SIDDIQUI'S ACTIVITIES, THE DEPUTY HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR BANGLADESH APPEARED TO ACCEPT FOR THE RECORD THE GOI'S EXPLANATION OF THE MEETINGS.

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5. REGARDING THE POSSIBILITY OF PRESIDENT ZIA VISITING INDIA, THE "HINDUSTAN TIMES" DECEMBER 2 REPORTED THAT ZIA IS PLANNING STATE VISITS TO NEPAL, INDIA, PAKISTAN AND SRI LANKA, MAINLY TO ASSESS THE VIEWS OF THE RESPECTIVE GOVERNMENTS TOWARDS BANGLADESH AND TO APPRISE THEM OF THE POLITICAL CHANGES TAKING PLACE IN BANGLADESH. ACCORDING TO UNNAMED SOURCES, THE PROPOSED TRIP WOULD BE IN KEEPING WITH BDG'S POLICY OF DIVERSIFYING RELATIONS IN THE SUBCONTINENT AND ESTABLISHING CLOSER LINKS. THE BANGLADESH DEPUTY HIGH COMMISSIONER SAID THAT HE COULD NOT CONFIRM THE REPORT BUT THAT THERE ARE TALKS GOING ON.

AN MEA OFFICIAL WAFFLED ON THE QUESTION BUT DID NOT DENY
THAT A VISIT MIGHT BE IN THE WORKS. IF THE VISIT
WERE TO TAKE PLACE EITHER IN DECEMBER OR JANUARY, AS
DACCA NOTES AS A POSSIBILITY, THE DIN OF ANTI-BDG
CHARGES FROM VARIED POLITICAL QUARTERS WILL HARDLY
PROVIDE A HELPFUL BACKDROP FOR FURTHER RECONCILIATION
OF BILATERAL DIFFERENCES. IN THE MEANTIME, WE
ANTICIPATE THAT THE SAME ACCUSATIONS AND THE SAME GOI
RESPONSES ABOUT THE INDO-BANGLADESH RELATIONSHIP WILL
CONTINUE TO BE AIRED IN PARLIAMENT AND SECTIONS OF THE PRESS.
GOHEEN

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Message Attributes

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